



# Primary Health Care

*Primary health care refers to an approach to health and a spectrum of services beyond the traditional health care system. It includes all services that play a part in health, such as income, housing, education, and environment.*

## Role of Physiotherapy in Primary Health Care

Physiotherapists are regulated health professionals whose practice includes health promotion and disease prevention. Physiotherapists working in primary health care teams maximize mobility in response to the needs of patients across the lifespan. Physiotherapists help ensure continuity of care for patients and their families across the care continuum.

Physiotherapists in primary health care facilitate diagnosis, treatment and management of a variety of acute and chronic conditions, and promote physical activity, increased mobility and function.

### Impact on Patient Experience

Physiotherapists are uniquely qualified to assess, improve and/or maintain a patient's functional independence and physical performance.

- Physiotherapy is highly effective in reducing acute and chronic pain, while significantly limiting the risk of increased disability and chronic conditions.
- Physiotherapists' knowledge, skills and understanding of pathology provide flexible, patient-centred care which ensures the unique needs of the patient are met.
- Physiotherapists are well positioned to help patients and their families navigate community resources in order to optimize functional potential.
- There is a clear, positive relationship between increased physical functioning and improved quality of life.

### Impact on Population Health

Health is determined by complex interactions between social and economic factors, the physical environment and individual behaviour. Physiotherapists, as primary health care providers, consider population health needs and incorporate population health approaches into program planning and treatment interventions to have the greatest impact on health outcomes. For example, physiotherapists play an important role in the prevention and management of chronic disease including hypertension, emphysema, Type II diabetes and obesity.

- Physiotherapists increase the capacity of primary healthcare teams to treat more patients by screening, assessments and diagnosis, providing conservative treatment plans to improve functional outcomes.
- Physiotherapy is highly effective in the management of many health conditions and populations seen in Primary Health Care, including arthritis, obesity, cardiovascular disease, cancer, stroke and musculoskeletal disorders.





- Physiotherapy programs focused on strength and balance have been shown to lower mortality rates related to falls, and the risk and rate of falls in older adults.
- Physiotherapists work with patients to identify and target modifiable risk factors to prevent onset or progression of chronic diseases and their related symptoms.

### Impact on Healthcare Costs

- Physiotherapy in primary health care is both cost effective and improves health outcomes. Physiotherapy can significantly impact the future use of healthcare services by allowing patients to get the care they need before it reaches the stage of acute care. Providing self-management and other treatment options, physiotherapists reduce surgical consults, reduce the need for hospital stays, and allow patients to live at-home with supportive therapy. Physiotherapists can accurately assess, triage and treat patients, reducing patient treatment costs and significantly impacting surgical wait times.
- Physiotherapy in Primary Health Care contributes to accurate orthopedic and musculoskeletal assessments which facilitates the appropriate use of imaging.
- The estimated cost of treating patients who experience a fall is approximately 1.85 times higher than the implementation of a falls prevention program.
- Physiotherapy can decrease medication use for chronic lung disease, diabetes, and hypertension.
- Physiotherapy can reduce the number of ICU admissions over time, and assist patients in managing health conditions, enabling them to remain in their homes longer.

### Summary

Physiotherapists have the knowledge and skills to actively participate in primary health care by focusing on health promotion, disease prevention and interventions that improve or maintain the health of Canadians. With rising healthcare costs there is a need to better match health services with the needs of communities. Physiotherapists are regulated health professionals who possess the knowledge and skills to deliver quality care for individuals with a range of acute and chronic conditions in primary health care settings. The inclusion of physiotherapy in primary health care leads to better access, improved patient and family experiences, a healthier population, and reliable, predictable and sustainable health system outcomes.

*\* Dionne, et al., "The challenge of obtaining information necessary for multi-criteria decision analysis implementation: the case of physiotherapy services in Canada", Cost Effectiveness and Resource Allocation. 2013. 11:11.*

The value of a health care service is more than its proven cost-effectiveness. Quality of life, access, and continuity of care and integration of services are equally important criteria when looking at the broader concept of value.

